

Classical Chinese Philosophy

Getty L. Lustila, *Northeastern University*

COURSE DESCRIPTION

In this course, we examine the major thinkers and schools of thought in Classical Chinese philosophy (550-221 BCE). We will cover the work of Confucius (551-479 BCE), Mozi (470-391 BCE), Yang Zhu (440-360 BCE), Mencius (372-289 BCE), Laozi (sometime in the 6th century BCE), Zhuangzi (370-289 BCE), Xunzi (-238 BCE), and Han Feizi (279-233 BCE). A few of our guiding questions will be, “are human beings naturally moral?”; “what is the place of education in cultivating virtue?”; “are we justified in caring more for the well-being of our friends than that of strangers?”; “does the government have a unique role in promoting the virtue of its citizens?” These questions are largely centered on how to interpret The Way (*dao*), i.e., the pattern of a life well lived. Not until the 17th century did Western philosophers begin to read these philosophers still, we see significant overlap in the issues that troubled Confucius, Mencius, and others and those which animated Plato, Aristotle, Epictetus, etc. Further, we see that Chinese philosophy still has much to teach us about what it means to be a good person.

COURSE OBJECTIVES

The primary objects of the course are to

- Give you familiarity with one of the world’s great philosophical traditions.
- Refine your ability to carefully read and analyze texts.
- Develop your skills as a writer – learning to produce clear, coherent prose and craft well-structured arguments.
- Develop your skills as a communicator – learning to receive feedback on your ideas and writing from your peers and to give helpful feedback to others.
- Spark your natural curiosity for philosophical ideas and questions.

TEXTS

Patricia Buckley Ebrey, *The Cambridge Illustrated History of China*

Bryan W. Van Norden, *Introduction to Classical Chinese Philosophy*

Philip J. Ivanhoe and Bryan W. Van Norden, *Readings in Classical Chinese Philosophy*

ASSIGNMENTS

1. 15 reading responses, in response to a reading presented in a text covered that week in class.

These papers should be ~500 words and have the following structure

- a. Present the argument (e.g. Mozi's argument against holding funerals).
- b. Raise a response to this argument (e.g. Mozi overlooks X – some benefit to society - about the practice of funerals).

The responses are designed to help you with the reading and will be the springboard for our discussions. They will be collected at the end of class. Summaries will be graded on a ✓+ (excellent), ✓ (adequate), ✓- (deficient or late), and N/C (not deserving of credit) basis. What counts as 'late'? If you have completed the summary but arrive to class more than 10 minutes late without excuse, or if you don't submit the summary until the beginning of the next class, then your response is late. If by the beginning of the next class you have still not submitted the response, you receive a N/C.

2. Two critical engagement papers, where you put two thinkers we have read in conversation on a particular issue (e.g. Mengzi and Xunzi on the proper balance of *learning* and *thinking* in education).

These papers should be ~1500 words and have the following structure:

- a. Present thinker 1's position (e.g. Mengzi).
- b. Criticize it using thinker 2's position (e.g. Xunzi).
- c. Respond on behalf of thinker 1 (e.g. Mengzi).
- d. Explain: Is this a good response? Why or why not? (i.e., does Mengzi have a good reply to Xunzi, or does it strike you as insufficient? Why or why not?).

There will be FOUR opportunities to submit a critical engagement paper (see Schedule below). They are due at the beginning of class. Students must make arrangements with the instructor regarding papers due during an absence; when the absence is unexcused, the paper will be penalized a third of a letter grade for every class day that it is late (e.g., from an A- to a B+).

3. Breakdown of your final grade:
Reading Responses (15) and participation = 70%
Critical engagement papers (2) = 30%

CLASS SCHEDULE

Week 1	Introduction	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Patricia Buckley Ebrey, <i>The Cambridge Illustrated History of China</i>, Chapters 1-3 Bryan W. Van Norden, <i>Introduction to Classical Chinese Philosophy</i>, “The Historical Context” Philip J. Ivanhoe and Bryan W. Van Norden, <i>Readings in Classical Chinese Philosophy</i>, Introduction
Week 2	Confucius and Confucianism	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <i>Introduction</i>, “Kongzi and Confucianism” <i>Readings</i>, “Kongzi,” 1-28 Confucius, <i>Analects</i>, Books 3-15
Week 3	(cont.)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <i>Introduction</i>, “Kongzi and Virtue Ethics” <i>Introduction</i>, “Appendix C: Kongzi as Systematic Philosopher” <i>Readings</i>, “Kongzi,” 28-54
Week 4	Mozi	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <i>Introduction</i>, “Mohist Consequentialism” <i>Readings</i>, “Mozi” Mozi, “Against Confucianism” Mozi, “Condemnation of Offensive Warfare” Mozi, “Against Fatalism”
Week 5	Yang Zhu	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <i>Introduction</i>, “Yang Zhu and Egoism” <i>Readings</i>, “Robber Zhi” “The Old Fisherman” (Ibid.) “Yang Zhu,” <i>The Book of Lieh-tzu</i>
Week 6	Mengzi and the Revival of Confucianism	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <i>Introduction</i>, “Mengzi and Human Nature” <i>Readings</i>, “Mengzi”
Week 7	Method and Narrative	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> D.C. Lau, “Mencius’ Use of Analogy” <i>Readings</i>, “Mengzi” (selections) <i>Readings</i>, “Mozi” (selections)
Week 8	History of the Warring States Period	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <i>The Cambridge Illustrated History of China</i>, Chapter 4 John Keay, <i>China: A History</i>, Chapter 3-5
Week 9	Laozi	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <i>Introduction</i>, “The <i>Daodejing</i> and Mysticism” <i>Readings</i>, “The <i>Daodejing</i>” Wang Bi, “Outline Introduction to the <i>Laozi</i>”

Week 10	Zhuangzi	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Introduction, “Zhuangzi’s Therapeutic Skepticism and Relativism”</i> • <i>Readings, “Zhuangzi”</i>
Week 11	Natural Philosophy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “Master Tsou” • “Yin-Yang and the Five Phases” • “Cosmology before the Han”
Week 12	Women and Gender	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Oracle Bone Inscriptions on Women, <i>Images of Women in Chinese Thought and Culture</i> • Odes, selections (Ibid.) • Baosi and King You of Zhou (Ibid.) • Gongfu Wenbo’s mother (Ibid.) • Bhao Zhao, Lessons for Women, selections (Ibid.)
Week 13	Xunzi	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Introduction, “Xunzi’s Confucian Naturalism”</i> • <i>Readings, “Xunzi”</i>
Week 14	Han Feizi and the School of Legalism	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Introduction, “Han Feizi”</i> • <i>Readings, “Han Feizi”</i> • <i>The Huainanzi: A Guide to the Theory and Practice of Government in Early Han China</i>, selections
Week 15	Legacy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Introduction, “Later Chinese Thought”</i> • <i>The Cambridge Illustrated History of China</i>, Chapter 5- <i>The Four Books: The Basic Teachings of the Later Confucian Tradition</i> (selections)